

## Script for Free and Reduced Price Application Process Webinar

1. Thank you for joining this training session on the Free and Reduced Application Process. This is a prerecorded webinar and can be stopped or paused at any point. To get started make sure your speakers are on and turned up. You will use the pause button located at the bottom left of the screen to pause the webinar and the stop button to start the webinar over. You can adjust the volume using the speaker key located next to the stop button. **Next slide.**
2. In this tutorial, you will learn the basic skills needed to successfully implement this process within your organization. Most importantly, should you have any questions or concerns while processing applications please know that you can call the state office for assistance. We are here to help! **Next Slide.**
3. Today we will take a step-by-step approach for completing the free and reduced application process. Specific information will be included on where you can locate the instructions and letters on our website for direct certification, processing free and reduced price applications, verification, and direct verification. We will also discuss the time table you will need to follow throughout the entire year in order to complete all of the necessary reports on time. **Next Slide.**
4. It is important to follow this Free and Reduced Timetable each year. These are necessary steps to keep your program in compliance by meeting all of the required deadlines. Direct Certification is the first step in your free and reduced approval process. Required for all schools, it should be run in late July or early August. Letters to households who have been directly certified should then be sent. The next step is to distribute applications to all households except those who have already been directly certified. Once applications are received, they should be processed within 10 business days. Beginning in early October, start the verification process. Verification should be completed by November 15<sup>th</sup>. If you are unable to meet this deadline, you should notify the state office. Lastly, your Verification Summary Report must be on file in the CNPweb by December 15<sup>th</sup>. **Next Slide.**
5. Hopefully by now, you are familiar with our website. The address is [www.doe.in.gov/food](http://www.doe.in.gov/food). By scrolling to the middle of our home page you will find a purple box with the heading School Nutrition Programs, circled in red in this snapshot of the website. All of the links referred to in today's presentation can be found by clicking on the School Nutrition Programs link. For easy access, save this website as a favorite on your computer. **Next Slide.**
6. After clicking on School Nutrition Programs, you will see the login for the CNPweb, and also a heading below it entitled Free and Reduced Price Information. Your "best friend" in the entire free and reduced price application process will be the Eligibility Guidance Manual, seen here circled in red. This manual contains information on Federal requirements regarding the determination and verification of eligibility for free and reduced price meals. The Eligibility Guidance Manual will answer questions that won't be covered today on topics such as how to handle applications regarding homeless, migrant, and adopted children. Print a copy of the manual so it is handy and can be referred to often. **Next Slide.**
7. The first step in the application process is to run Direct Certification. Now required for all schools, direct certification replaces the traditional paper application and is based on food stamp and TANF benefits. Students are certified eligible for FREE meals without parents

having to complete an application or the school having to process an application. By running direct certification before accepting applications you will reduce the number of paper applications you have to process, thereby reducing the number of applications you will have to verify later in the fall. **Next Slide.**

8. Ideally, direct certification should be done in July or the first week of August, before students return to school and before distributing free and reduced applications. The direct certification how-to manuals can be found on the School Nutrition Programs website by clicking on Free and Reduced Price Forms. There are two methods of direct certification: STN and Traditional. For instruction on the traditional method where you will upload your student master list, click on Direct Certification Manual. For instruction on the STN method using student information from the previous year, click on Direct Certification - STN Method Quick Start. All schools are now required to do Direct Certification and for your convenience we have a tutorial that details specific instructions for running direct certification. The link to this tutorial can be found in several places on our website. **Next Slide.**
9. Once your direct certification list is generated, you will have a list of students who are approved for FREE meals. You must send a letter to households of directly certified students informing them that they have been approved for free benefits and reminding them not to complete a paper free/reduced application. You can find the Direct Certification Notification Letter on our website under Free and Reduced Price Forms, under School Meal Benefits and then click on Direct Certification. **Next Slide.**
10. Effective August 2009, any other student who resides in the same household of a student who is directly certified also qualifies for FREE meals. You will not find this information in the 2008 edition of the Eligibility Guidance Manual but can find it on our website under USDA policies. It is SP38-2009. The policy states, "If other children in a household are not on the direct certification list, you can directly certify the rest of the students in the household based on the child (or children) who are on the direct certification list. A household is defined as "a group of related or nonrelated individuals, who are not residents of an institution or boarding house, but who are living as one economic unit." Parents/Guardians always have the option of declining benefits or could opt to request reduced benefits for their children. **Next Slide.**
11. Another feature of direct certification, Direct Cert Lookup, is useful for identifying directly certified students on an individual basis, such as when a new student is admitted during the school year. When you locate a student using the lookup feature, be sure to print the document of eligibility and file it either with your applications or in your direct certification file. As a reminder, you should never use Direct Lookup to check a paper application, unless that particular application has been selected for verification. **Next Slide.**
12. Once direct certification is complete and households of direct certified students are notified to not complete an application, you will need to send an application and parent letter with instructions to all the other (non-directly certified households) in your school or district. The applications could be sent out by mail or inserted into enrollment packets. The application and parent letter/instructions can be found on our website under Free and Reduced Price Information, Free and Reduced Price Forms. Click on Application for Meals and the Parent Letter/Instructions for Meals under School Meal Benefits. **Next Slide.**
13. Shortly after the applications have been distributed, you will begin to receive applications for processing. First, cross check all apps with your direct certification list and disregard any applications for households that have already been directly certified. It is important to note

that applications must be processed within 10 days of receipt, so it is critical to get organized and stay organized during this time. Applications from the prior year are valid only for the first 30 operating days of the new school year (beginning with the first day of school). If a new application is not received within that time period, benefits must be terminated for any students after that 30 day grace period. Any applications with incomplete or missing information should be denied if attempts to gather that information are unsuccessful. In addition, if information appears to be questionable or inconsistent, the application can be approved at “face value” and then immediately verified for cause. **Next Slide.**

14. It is very important that you check to make sure each application is complete and includes the required information: Each child's name and school they attend in the top section and any Food Stamp number written in for each child, if applicable. For your information, Food Stamp numbers begin with 10 and are 10 digits long. (As a reminder you would only verify Food Stamp or TANF numbers if the application was selected during your verification process or if there is a reason to suspect that the application was fraudulent.) There is a section for any adult member to list their Food Stamp number on the application. Any children who reside in a household where an adult (or non-student child) is receiving Food Stamps or TANF assistance is also eligible for free meals. **Next Slide.**
15. If there are no Food Stamp or TANF case numbers, all family members and any income for each member should be listed. Check to make sure that the school aged children have been listed in this section also. If not, make sure they are included in the total household size. Income frequency is very important when determining benefits based on income so make sure that pay is marked as either weekly, every 2 weeks (26 pay periods per year), twice a month (24 pay periods per year), monthly, or yearly. If you are unsure of the frequency of pay on the application, please contact the household or deny the application as incomplete. All applications must have an adult signature and a date when the application was signed. The last four digits of a social security number for income eligible applications must be provided or the no social security number box must be checked. **Next Slide.**
16. Use the income guidelines to calculate benefits based on income. The income guidelines can be found on our website under Free and Reduced Price Information. The income guidelines are updated yearly at the beginning of each school year. If you receive an application that has varying frequencies of pay, calculate an annual rate of pay. Do this by multiplying weekly gross income by 52; every two weeks gross income times 26; twice a month gross income by 24; and monthly income times 12. Total all the incomes to get the yearly household income and compare that to the income guidelines according to the household size. It is wise to flag your error prone applications when processing applications. Error prone applications are those that are within \$100 of the monthly amount or \$1200 of the yearly amount on the income eligibility guidelines. By flagging them as they are processed, it will save steps when pulling applications for verification in October. **Next Slide.**
17. If for some reason, there is zero income listed for every household member, the application should be approved temporarily for up to 45 days, but tagged as temporary and re-evaluated before the end of the 45 day period. Before the end of the temporary approval, you must check with the household to see if there is any change of income. If there is still zero income, students may be approved for free meals for the rest of the school year OR the application may be tagged to be re-evaluated at a future date. More information for approving temporary applications can be found on page 21 (Part 3, Section H) of the Eligibility Manual for School Meals. **Next Slide.**

18. The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 now automatically qualifies foster children for free meals. Every foster child has categorical eligibility for free meals and can be certified without proving any other form of eligibility. Households with both foster and non-foster children may choose to include the foster child as a household member and can report any personal income earned by a foster child on the same application as the non-foster child. This will streamline the application process and help a foster family's non-foster children to qualify for free or reduced price meals based on household size and income. This does not mean that other non-foster children in the household are automatically eligible. When approving the application, decide if the non-foster children are eligible based on the household's income or other categorical eligibility information reported on the application. **Next Slide.**
19. This next step is often forgotten during the application approval process. Complete the eligibility determination on the back of the application and sign and date it. Applications should be filed by building but kept in a central location for the entire school district (if multiple schools). **Next Slide.**
20. If a student withdraws during the school year, pull that application from the Active File and after documenting the withdrawal date on the application, file it in a Withdrawn file. Applications that are received from families already approved through direct certification should also be filed in a separate Non-Active file. It is important to separate these files from the other applications because the number of applications necessary for the next step, Verification, is based on the number of active applications on file in October. **Next Slide.**
21. Once all applications are approved, begin planning for Verification. Verification is simply the procedure necessary to "prove or validate" a certain percentage of your applications. Copies of everything generated during verification such as applications, correspondence, and any income documents must be kept in a verification file and retained for three years plus the current school year. **Next Slide.**
22. At the beginning of October you will pull applications randomly for verification. Once you have pulled the applications, the applications must be reviewed to determine that the original eligibility was correctly determined. This is called a confirmation review and must be done by someone other than the original approver. When you have confirmed the application was originally approved correctly, place your signature on the back of the application on the confirmation review line just above the verification box. The confirmation review may be waived if you use computer software that accurately makes eligibility determinations. If the initial determination was incorrect, you must correct the household's eligibility status and notify the household of the change with an explanation and allow the household to reapply. Make copies of the application(s) selected for verification and place the originals in a separate file labeled Verification. **Next Slide.**
23. If at any time during the school year an application has inconsistencies or questionable information, it is necessary to verify the application "for cause". This application would not be considered a part of your verification sample and would not be included in the Verification Summary Report. **Next Slide.**
24. The next step is to logon to the STN database and do a direct verification. Unlike direct certification, direct verification verifies an application based on Food Stamp, TANF, and Medicaid information. If you find a household listed and the information confirms the status of the application, print the information and attach to the application and verification is

complete for that application. Simply file in your Verification folder and you are done (you only need to verify one student on a multi-student family application to consider the application verified). If you do not find the household listed, a verification letter must be sent to the household. **Next Slide.**

25. Details regarding verification letters and instructions can be found on our website under Free and Reduced Price Information. Click on Verification Information then click on Verification How-To. **Next Slide.**
26. For the applications that cannot be directly verified, a letter must be sent to the household notifying them that their application has been selected for verification and instructing them to send proof of income. The Verification Notification Letter can be found on our website under Verification Information. Click on Verification, then click on We *Must* Check Your Application found under Verification—Meals. **Next Slide.**
27. When you receive verification of income, calculate the benefit based on all of the income. If the household benefits decrease (for example, change from Free to Reduced) or are terminated, you must give the household 10 days notification and may only change the benefit status of the student after the 10 day period has passed. If the household benefits increase (such as going from Reduced to Free), you must notify the household within 3 days and the student status must be changed immediately. In the event that a household does not respond, follow up with a phone call. If the household still doesn't respond or is uncooperative, meal benefits must be terminated. **Next Slide.**
28. After verification is complete, you must notify the household if benefits stay the same, if they change, or if they are terminated. The letter notifying households of their benefit status after verification can be found on our website under Verification Information. Click on We *Have* Checked your Application under the heading Verification—Meals. **Next Slide.**
29. Verification must be complete by November 15 and the Verification Summary completed on the CNP Web by December 15. Found on the Claims/AFR tab on the CNP Web, the verification summary will to be available to complete only after you have filed your October claim. **Next Slide.**
30. Thank you for joining us for this WebEx on Processing Free and Reduced Applications for your school nutrition programs. We hope you found this training informative and helpful.  
**The End**